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ABSTRACT

This is the final report of a study to identify the role of economics education in the professional activities of college and university social studies educators. Two groups of social studies educators, one randomly selected and the other from the college and university section of the National Council for the Social Studies, received a questionnaire requesting level of economics education, attitudes toward economics education, degree of cooperation with economists, and level of interest for increasing understanding of economics. The stimulus for the study was determining the need for a program in economics designed specifically for social studies educators. The results of the survey indicate that the general background in economics of social studies educators is very weak, that interdisciplinary activity between educators and economists is lacking, and that a high degree of interest exists among social studies educators in enriching their understanding of economics. Contained in this report are the objectives, rationale, design, results, analysis of data, and conclusions of the study. Appendices including a sample questionnaire and collected data are available from the author. (JH)

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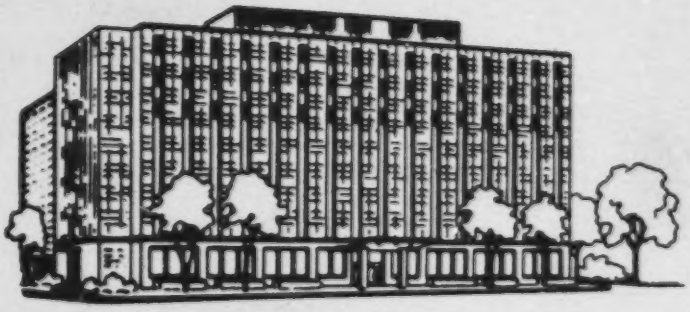

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THE ROLE OF ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS

by

Dennis J. Weidenaar

Paper No. 490 - January 1975

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

This is the final report on a study to identify the role of economics education in the professional activities of college and university social studies educators. This study, which was conducted by the Purdue Center for Economics Education and funded by the Sears-Roebuck Foundation, sought specifically to determine among college and university social studies educators the level of economics education they had attained, their attitudes toward economics education, the degree of cooperation which exists between economists and social studies educators, and the level of interest among social studies educators in increasing their understanding of economics. The stimulus for this study was the desire to obtain the information necessary to determine whether social studies educators view a program in economics education designed specifically to meet their needs as necessary, and if so, what format it should assume.

Various approaches have been used to raise the level of economic literacy among Americans. The most frequently used approach has been to deal with the problem through the schools by providing workshops for teachers and assistance for the development of materials. One facet of the educational process which has not been explored, however, is the area of social studies teacher education. It is natural for people to share experiences which they have found fulfilling. If, however, a significant number of college level social studies educators have never had formal exposure to economics or if their economics education experiences were distasteful, it is not likely that their students will be encouraged to take courses in economics. Prior to this study, however, the extent of economics education and the attitude of social studies educators towards economics has been conjectural. This study is designed to remove the conjecture and put forth empirical evidence on these issues.

Two groups of social studies educators, a randomly-selected group and the college and university section of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), were queried in order to obtain the desired economics education information. The results of this inquiry reveal that in general:

1. College and university social studies educators have an academic background in college level economics averaging less than two courses, with about one fifth never having had a single economics course. Further, of those reporting having taken a course in economics, over half took the course more than 12 years ago. In addition, the data show that the younger social studies educators on average have fewer economics courses than their older colleagues.
2. The vast majority of college and university social studies educators have never, either as a student or as a professor, attended any program to increase their understanding of economics. Very few social studies educators have ever cooperated with an economist in either a joint teaching or research project.
3. When queried as to whether they thought there is a need at this time for further economics education for college and university social studies educators: 40% responded that a great need exists; 53% responded that some need exists; and 4% indicated that little or no need exists.
4. When pressed further and asked whether they in fact would be interested in attending a program designed to increase their understanding of economics, 51% responded as being very much interested, 38% responded with some interest, and 10% had little or no interest in such a program.

Based on the evidence gathered in our random sample and corroborated by the data obtained from the NCSS group, it appears that:

1. Given the demands upon social studies educators, their general background in economics is very weak at best.
2. If interdisciplinary activity between educators and economists at the college and university level is at all desirable, much remains to be done in this area.
3. A high degree of interest exists among social studies educators in enriching their understanding of economics.

In light of the results presented above it is our conclusion that an appropriately designed program to enhance the economics understanding of college and university social studies educators would have a significant effect in raising the level of economic literacy among our nation's school-age children.

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OBJECTIVES

The general purpose of this study is to determine the role, if any, which economics education has had in the professional activities of college and university level educators of social studies teachers. As a means of specifying this general goal in terms of sub-objectives which we could measure, we sought to determine:

1. The level of economics education attained by college and university social studies educators.
2. The attitudes of educators of social studies teachers toward economics.
3. The degree of cooperation currently existing between social studies educators and economists in educational projects.
4. The degree of interest of social studies educators in a program to improve their understanding of economics - both conceptually and in an applied sense.

To obtain the information necessary to achieve these goals a questionnaire was constructed consisting of three parts. This questionnaire and a covering letter are reproduced in Appendix A. [1/] The first part of the questionnaire was titled, "General Information," and sought to obtain information on the nature of the college in which the respondent taught, the highest degree earned, the major areas of interest in education, age, sex, courses currently taught, the respondent's view of his(her) primary function in his(her) profession, materials they have produced, and professional society memberships.

The second part of the questionnaire was titled, "Economics Training and Involvement in Economics Education." It queried the respondent as to the number of college level economics courses taken, whether they were undergraduate courses, when the last course in economics was taken, whether he(she) had ever participated in an economics education program in any capacity, whether he(she) had ever cooperated with an economist on a teaching or research project, and if he(she) ever had any contact with a Center for Economics Education.

The last part of the questionnaire was, "The Need, Feasibility, and

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[1/] The appendices cited in this report may be obtained by writing to the author.

Approach to Economics Education for Social Studies Educators." It began by asking the respondent's opinion as to the degree of need at this time for further economics education for social studies educators; if a program were designed, what format would be preferred; if invited to attend such a program, would he(she) come; what time of the year would be most preferable for such a program; how long should such a project be; and finally, what pedagogic approach should such a program use: should it be organized around economic concepts, econom. problems, or methods and materials?

RATIONALE

Government officials, business leaders, and union officials constantly decry the average citizen's level of economic understanding and over the past two decades these groups have supported numerous efforts designed to raise the level of economic understanding. Most of these efforts reflect the belief that if improvement in economic understanding is going to occur on a large scale, it must come through the schools. Yet recent studies show that the textbooks used in the schools, though improving, fall far short of being adequate and that most teachers simply are not trained in economics, or at best, poorly trained.[1/]

Evidence also exists showing that the courses of study taken by future school teachers do not include sufficient economics education to identify and apply basic concepts. The Joint Council on Economic Education reports that only one half of all social studies teachers in United States schools have had as much as one college course in economics. In fact, only twelve of the fifty states require any kind of economics course for high school social studies teachers and the requirements are even lower for junior high and elementary school teachers. If indeed, economics understanding is an important as most government, business and union officials believe, how do we account for this paucity of economics education experiences among our nation's school teachers? One hypothesis that has been set forth is

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1/ See the four volume series, Economics in Social Studies Textbooks, published by the Joint Council on Economic Education, New York, N.Y.,1973

that many social studies teachers avoid economics, or at best, take one or two courses in economics because the college and university social studies educators by whom they were taught and/or counselled themselves have had very little formal education in economics. Evidence suggest that the majority of social studies educators are trained primarily in history. This is not surprising, of course, since history courses are mandated in virtually every curriculum. Hence, colleges of education have felt compelled to educate social studies teachers with strength in history. This strength, however, may well be at the cost of weakness in economics and the other social sciences.[2/] If this hypothesis is true, then focussing resources on the educators of social studies teachers may well be a heretofore unutilized means of improving economic literacy in the future - a means with the potential for having a significant multiplier effect. A college or university social studies educator whose methods classes are liberally sprinkled with pedogogical examples using economic concepts and applications is very likely to influence the students in that class as to the importance of economics.

The purpose for this study, therefore, is to obtain hard data as to the degree of economics education acquired by college and university social studies educators and their attitudes toward economics education in general.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The task of identifying the formal economics education, the attitudes toward economics education, and the degree of need felt for further economics education by college and university social studies educators was undertaken in the Spring of 1974.

2/ Robert Dale Barr, in an unpublished doctoral thesis entitled, The Changing Role of History in the American Public Schools, Purdue University, August 1969, has written, "The combined weight of state laws, school and college requirements, and activities of historians resulted in teaching predominantly history in the social studies curriculum." p. 29.

The first step in this process was to identify and locate those persons falling under the rubric, college and university social studies educators. Using Patterson's American Education, we selected 200 of the nation's 1130 colleges of education by a random process.[1/] The dean, department head, or appropriate official was then contacted by letter (Appendix B) and requested to provide the names of his staff members involved in educating teachers in the area of social studies. Of the 200 schools contacted, almost 180 responded, a response rate of 90%. The number of names on the lists prepared by the appropriate officials varied from one to as many as twenty. In some cases, however, the names provided were of faculty members in a department other than education, most frequently in a social science discipline. The names identified as such were deleted from our sample since our objective was to reach the full time social studies educator. We ended up with a list including 325 names representing small and large, private and public, colleges and universities from all parts of the country. Each member of this group of 325 was sent a questionnaire designed to elicit the information cited above. The questionnaire and cover letter appear in Appendix A.

At the same time that these 325 randomly-selected college and university social studies educators were being questioned, the same questionnaire was being sent to members of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) belonging in the college and university section. 250 names were on this list.

The response of both groups, the random sample and the NCSS group exceeded 80% and the information which comprises the body of this report is based on the data revealed by these completed questionnaires.

RESULTS

Statistical Profile Of The Respondents

The Random Sample

The "most typical" respondent is a male in his 40's teaching either in a 4-year college or a university. He is most likely to have either an EdD degree or a PhD degree. He is likely to be teaching in the area of social

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1/ Patterson's American Education lists the names and addresses of all colleges of education, among others. It is published by Educational Directories Incorporated, Mt. Prospect, Illinois, 1974.

studies methods, views his primary function as teaching, with administration being his secondary function. He is not likely to have published extensively, although he may have written a monograph or a case packet. He is likely to be a member of the NCSS, but not an officer in that organization.

He has likely had less than two courses on the undergraduate college level in economics. The last economics course taken was at least 12 years ago.

He has never been involved in an economics education workshop either as a participant or as a staff member. He has never cooperated with a member of the economics department of his school in either a teaching or research capacity. His school is unlikely to have a Center for Economic Education on campus.

In his opinion he has a need for further economics education. If asked to attend a program designed to increase his understanding of economics he has indicated that he is very much interested in coming.

If such a program were conducted, our typical respondent would like to see it held in the summer, last 2 to 3 weeks, and focus on economic materials and problems.

The NCSS Group

The "most typical" respondent in the NCSS Group closely paralleled the random sample counterpart, except that: he viewed his secondary function as research rather than administration, he has probably published a bit more, he feels even more strongly a great need for economics education for social studies educators, and he is even more desirous of attending a program in economics education for college and university social studies educators than his randomly-selected counterpart.

Summary Of The Findings[1/]

Nature of the Sample

1. Nature of employing institution -

The random sample was almost evenly divided between educators teaching in 4 year colleges and universities with 49% employed by colleges and 48% by universities.

The NCSS group was more heavily distributed in the universities, 58% being affiliated with a university and 35% with a college.

2. Advanced degrees -

The random sample and the NCSS group differed very little with respect to the kinds of advanced degrees held. About 30% held the PhD degree, 44% held the EdD degree, and about 12% held an MA degree.

3. Primary area of interest in education -

The primary areas of educational interest in the random sample were: social studies methods, 34%; curriculum development, 17%; and student teaching direction, 14%. The NCSS group was more oriented toward social studies methods with 53% claiming it as their major area of interest.

4. Age -

The age distributions of the two groups are fairly close. They are:

Age	Random Sample	NCSS Group
30-39	30%	33%
40-49	35	36
50-59	23	18

5. Sex -

The male respondents were more numerous. They comprised 76% of the random sample and 66% of the NCSS group.

[1/] A more complete listing of the findings is presented in Appendix C.

6. Teaching responsibilities -

71% of the random sample had teaching responsibility in social studies methods and 77% of the NCSS group had that responsibility.

7. Primary function -

85% of both the random sample and the NCSS group view teaching as their primary function and about 8% of each group listed administration as their main function. Only 2 to 3% viewed research as their major function.

8. Membership in professional organizations -

44% of the random sample presently belong to the NCSS and 40% have never belonged. 30% belong to a state or local social studies professional group.

Economics Education and Involvement in Economics

1. Number of college-level economics courses taken -

The distribution of courses taken is:

No. of Courses	Random Sample	NCSS Group
0	19%	20%
1	24%	26%
2	24%	21%
3	13%	12%
4	7%	6%
5 or more	14%	13%

The arithmetic mean was 3.0 for the random sample and 2.9 for the NCSS group. The median number of courses taken was 2.8 and 2.6, respectively.

Of these courses, about 70% were undergraduate level.

The year in which the last course was taken ranged from 1927 to 1973. The median year was 1962.

2. Participation in economics education "workshops" -

About 17% of both groups have participated as staff members in an economic education workshop at one time or another and about 20% have participated as students.

3. Cooperation with economists -

94% of both groups have never cooperated with an economist on a research project and about 85% have never cooperated in a teaching project with an economist.

4. Cooperation with a Council or Center for economic education -

85% of both groups reported that they had never cooperated with a council or center. 25% of the respondents indicated that their school had a center for economic education while about 14% did not know whether one existed on their campus.

5. Economics courses taken and age -

The largest share of the respondents fell into 3 age categories: 30-39, 40-49, and 50 to 59. In the random sample, the youngest group was largest in terms of no courses taken. 22% of the 20-29 year group had never taken a single course while 20% of the 30-39 year group and only 10% of the 40-49 year group had never taken an economic course. The same pattern prevailed in the NCSS group.

6. Economics courses and sex -

Females comprised 23% of the random sample. 33.3% of them had no courses in economics while only 15% of the males had no courses. In the NCSS sample, 34% were females and 24% never had an economics course while 19% of the males never had a course.

7. Economics courses taken and courses currently taught by the respondents -

24% of those teaching social studies methods courses in the random sample have had no economics course while only 16% of those not teaching methods had no economics course. In the NCSS sample no difference emerges.

8. Economics courses taken and perception of need -

In the random sample, there was a direct relation between the number of economics courses taken and the expression of the opinion that the need for further economics education was great. 65% of those with 5 or more economics courses felt there was a great need for more economics education for social studies educators. 44% with 4 courses felt that way, 30% with 3 courses and then the percentage begin to rise. 35% of those with 1 course felt a great need, and 30% of those with zero courses felt a great need. The NCSS group showed the same pattern. The group with 3 courses having the smallest percentage of respondents expressing a great need.

9. Economics courses taken and personal interest in participating in an economics education program -

In the random sample, the more economics courses a respondent had, the more eager he was to participate. The pattern was pretty constant in the NCSS group.

Need and approach to economics education for social studies educators

1. Need -

When queried as to the need at this time for further economics education for college and university social studies educators, the response was:

Degree of Need	Random Sample	NCSS Group
Great Need	40%	46%
Some Need	53%	49%
Little Need	3%	3%
No Need	2%	1%

2. Institutional Arrangements -

The largest number of respondents felt that a summer institute would be the most appropriate format for an economics education program with a short intensive institute being recommended second most frequently.

3. Willingness to Attend -

The respondents interest in attending some programs in economics education, if paid a "reasonable" stipend is represented below.

Interest	Random Sample	NCSS Group
Very Much	51%	58%
Some	38%	27%
Little	6%	9%
None	4%	5%

4. Timing -

Most respondents felt that June, July, and August were equally agreeable for such a program. In terms of its length, most opted for two to three weeks.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The previous section of this report provided a description of the major variables included in the study. The next appropriate step is to investigate the relationships which exist among the variables included in the study. The two major variables that we have selected to examine in relationship to the responses to the other questions in the study are: the number of economics courses taken and the opinion as to the need for further economic education for college and university social studies educators. The data on which the following remarks are based appears in Appendix D and are based on the random sample.

1. Number of college level economics courses taken related to:

   a. Nature of the employing institution -

      Social studies educators employed by universities on balance have taken more economics courses than their college counterparts. For example, 18% of university educators have never had a course in economics while 21% of college educators fall in that category. 62% of university educators have had less than 3 courses in economics while this is true for 73% of college educators.

	Economic Courses Taken					
Employer \	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
4 year college	21%	25%	27%	11%	2%	14%
University	18	22	22	14	11	12

   b. Kind of educational degree held -

      21% of the PhD holders have never had a single course in economics whereas a smaller percentage, 16% of the EdD holders fall in the same category. 67% of the PhD holders have had two or fewer courses in economics and 68% of the EdD holders fall in that classification.

c. Educational area of major interest -

34% of the educators cited social studies methods as their major area of interest in education and a larger than average percentage of that sub-group had never had an economics course, namely 21%. The data is summarized below by area of educational interest.

	Number of economics courses taken					
Area of Interest	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Curriculum development	18%	24%	27%	9%	13%	9%
Student teaching	14%	35	24	19	3	5
Methods	21	26	26	8	8	12

d. Age -

The younger the educator, the greater is the chance that he(she) has never taken a single course in economics.

	Number of economics courses taken					
Age	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
20-29	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%	0%
30-39	22	20	18	18	7	15
40-49	20	22	25	13	7	14
50-59	10	23	33	7	7	20

e. Sex -

Females have had fewer economics courses than males.

	Number of economics courses taken					
Sex	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Female	33%	35%	18%	7%	3%	3%
Male	15	20	25	14	8	17

f. Primary function as viewed by respondent -

85% of the educators listed teaching as their primary function and 8% listed administration. 40% of those in administration had no course in economics while only 16% of those in teaching had never had a course.

g. Membership in the National Council for Social Studies -

Members of the NCSS have had more economics courses than their non-affiliated colleagues.

	Number of economics courses taken					
NCSS	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Present members	18%	22%	25%	16%	6%	13%
Past members	13	18	28	10	20	13
Non-members	22	27	22	10	3	16

h. Participant in economic education workshop as a staff member -

18% of the random sample have at one time or another participated in an economics education workshop and 13% of this 18% have never had an economics course.

i. Opinion as to the need for economics education among social studies educators -

Two groups of educators expressed a strong need for more economics education - those with very little economics and those who have had many courses in economics. Of those educators who had never had an economics course, 38% felt a great need; of those with 1 course, 36% felt a great need; the percentage fell to 35% and 30% for those with 2 or 3 courses, respectively. Of those having taken 4 courses, however, 44% felt a great need; and 65% of those with 5 or more courses felt a great need.

j. Interest in attending an economics education institute for social studies educators -

In this category, there is a direct relationship with the number of courses taken and interest in attending an institute.

k. Emphasis of the proposed institute -

The participants could select whether they wanted a possible institute organized around theory, problems, or materials. Those with no economics courses favored materials most with theory and problems rated equally.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the frequency distributions of the responses to the questions in our survey and the cross-tabulated analysis of the data, we come to the following conclusions:

1. Most college and university social studies educators have very little formal education in economics. If we agree that social studies teachers in the schools should have some exposure to economics, it is even more important that the college level social studies educators have at least a modicum of economics understanding. The bases for this conclusion that the social studies educators have a weak educational background in economics are:

    a. 20% of college and university educators have <u>never</u> had a college-level course in economics.

    b. The average (arithmetic mean) number of economics courses taken by social studies educators is 2.1 and the median number of courses taken is 1.8.

    c. 43% of all social studies educators have taken at most, one course in economics.

    d. 67% of all social studies educators have taken at most, two courses in economics.

    e. Of those educators who have taken college level courses in economics, over 50% took their last course 12 or more years ago.

2. The future appears to be more bleak than the present. Although the number of respondents in our sample who were in their 20's is small (4%), 40% of them have never had a course in economics. As we move up in age by ten year intervals, the situation improves. 22% of the educators in their 30's have never had an economics course. 20% of those educators in their 40's have never had an economics course. Only 10% of the group in their 50's have not had a course in economics.

    The implication of this pattern is that as time passes fewer and fewer social studies educators are taking college level courses in economics.

3. Female social studies educators have less formal education in economics than their male counterparts. The bases for this conclusion are:
    a. Fully one third of the females in the sample have never had a course in economics.
    b. More than two thirds (68%) have had at most one course in economics.
    c. Only 13% of the female social studies educators have had more than two courses in economics.

4. The amount of interdisciplinary cooperation on a professional level between social studies educators and economists is small. The bases for this conclusion are:
    a. 91% of the respondents have never cooperated in a research project with a member of the economics department in their college or in any other college or university.
    b. 81% of the respondents have never cooperated in a teaching project with an economist.
    c. 12% of the respondents were unaware of whether their school had a Center for Economics Education on campus.

5. Social studies educators feel a need for further economics education. The bases for this conclusion are:
    a. 40% of the respondents expressed a "great" need for further economics education.
    b. An <u>additional</u> 53% of the respondents expressed "some" need for further economics education.
    c. Only 4% felt that no or little need exists.

6. Social studies educators are interested in <u>attending</u> a program to improve their economics understanding. The bases for this conclusion are:
    a. A majority (51%) of the respondents expressed "very much interest" in such a program.
    b. An additional 38% expressed some interest in such a program.
    c. Only 10% expressed no or little interest in attending such a program and in many cases these persons cited advanced age as the reason.

7. Social studies educators feel their interests would best be served by a program oriented toward methods and materials used in economics instruction. A program designed around economic problems was rated as being the second most attractive approach and a theoretically oriented program was regarded as being least desirable.

8. If such a program were to be held, the summer months were rated highest with little difference among June, July, or August being specified. Two to three weeks was the length most frequently opted for.

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